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NEWSPAPER FALTERS

Hard Times Hit Free Press

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The pencil-scrawled sign on the locked door of the Connecticut Avenue office building said, "People: Free Press will come out with a new edition early next week. We will move to a new location soon, as yet unknown. Keep on ———"

There was no new edition of the Washington Free Press last week, and it appears unlikely there will be one soon. The free-wheeling, controversial publication that used to be Washington's number one—and only—underground newspaper has fallen on hard times.

The paper with the stormy history of run-ins with police and legal hassles suffered what was apparently its biggest blow earlier this winter when its Connecticut Avenue offices were broken into, its files destroyed, and tables and chairs wrecked.

Staff Blames Police

Free Press staffers blamed the raid on the police. It was at least the third such incident at the paper's offices: In the fall of 1968, someone set fire to the paper's former office at 3 Thomas Circle, and last spring police broke into the Connecticut Avenue office in search of papers they claimed had been stolen from George Washington University files.

Editors and former editors of the paper are reluctant to talk about the status of the paper now, although one described it as "the culmination of all the pressures that have been put on us in one big raid." It has not published since late last year.

He said that "everything

that looked like it was valuable to a newspaper" had been wrecked, and indicated the paper was having difficulty recovering from the latest attack.

Willing to Talk

The editors of The Quicksilver Times are considerably more willing to talk about the struggles of their competitor.

Quicksilver, an underground paper with an editorial tone similar to the Free Press, now has a circulation of about 10-15,000, but two of its editors say that its rise and the Free Press's decline are simply coincidental.

"They started publishing more sporadically at the end of last summer," said one editor, "and we started this paper at the beginning of the summer, but their problems don't have so much to do with any competition from us. The problem is that a lot of their staff has taken off lately—several of them went to Cuba—and at the same time the cops started hitting them."

Quicksilver, which has neat, spacious offices in an old house in the 1900 block of 17th Street N.W., guards against the possibility of break-ins by keeping someone in the office 24 hours a day. When this guard has been relaxed, the editors say, there have been incidents of minor vandalism.

The Quicksilver editors say they see no reason why two

underground newspapers cannot coexist in Washington, and they deny any suggestion that the recent raid on The Free Press was led by Quicksilver people. Such raids have occurred in feuds between underground publications elsewhere.